

Summer 1961

# outposts

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## JOHN HEWITT

### *The Twisted Heart*

I HAVE seen camels at the outer gate,  
and muttering shepherds have come running by,  
gapped in their breath by thoughts of being late.  
Already dawn flares up the lower sky  
and with small cries the roof-birds congregate,  
ruffle and stir as though about to fly.  
The yawning servant pokes the ashy grate ;  
I pass the window with a wary eye,  
for all my terror, carefully sedate.  
I would have no one turn suspiciously  
to track me through the yard. Affairs of state  
demand a certain slow solemnity ;  
and past that door ajar our futures wait,  
unseen as yet, but signalled by a cry,  
exactly as the ancient scrolls relate.  
But what or who I hope to meet, and why,  
is still the subject of an old debate :  
with twisting heart I enter silently.

It may be, after all, the stories lie  
and here within's our judgment and our fate,  
to bring all down in ruin equally :  
the walls above this little town of late  
have weathered low that once were strong and high,  
and every man among us seems to wait  
with empty words and gestures, anxiously,  
some end to all, some avalanche or spate  
of crowding waters out of prophecy,  
to tumble past and leave all desolate.  
I twist my heart between that infant cry  
and the tall camels at the outer gate.

## ZULFIKAR GHOSE

*To My Ancestors*

### I

FROM where did you come? I glance at mirrors, inspect my nose, the fullness of my mouth, and from the grains of my skin pluck out hairs to look for roots. Rain clouds travel south in the Indian summer; did you, oh my fathers, come with the rain, tired of northern drought?

What lands did you husband with ox and plough before you came to bed by the Five Rivers of the Punjab? I have heard stories, how the Greeks and Moguls and other invaders, Genghiz Khan, Tamurlaine, found the green, low plains of the Indus a comfort from their wars.

But who were you? From where, where did you come? I feel my cheek-bones, finger the sutures along my skull, massage away random conjectures, but look for you in myself as an exiled monarch rules a map for a kingdom. Oh fathers, I am afraid of mirrors.

### II

My father is a businessman, but his blood is yours, nomadic and impatient. Every ten years or so he decides that business is bad and moves somewhere else: an Odysseus, he turns from the islands he has found but discovered not quite home; a farmer, he burns his corn.

But my grandfather lives where he was born, in Sialkot, building houses, carving wood. His beard dyed with henna and his turban crumbling among the wrinkles of his forehead, he is my one image of permanence, stubborn despite his sons that home is where you build;

not where you go, find money, age, go bald,  
find a wife, or die. Yet all his children  
are abroad as though a curse had compelled  
them to move to colder climates from the cauldron  
of their selves. Oh fathers, we are not settled,  
not where you pitched your tents, where you sowed corn.

## GORDON HARRIS

### *At an Exhibition*

HERE all the plastic idols come to die.  
Ten years of art arranged in retrospect:  
Collage of clay stuck on a square of sky,  
By force of habit images are wrecked.

Keep off the grass and do not dare to part  
These branches from that geographic head,  
Such visual trespassing may well restart  
The crimson river this stabbed canvas bled.

How many hearts can hang upon a wall  
Before the dawn thread of an old theme breaks?  
But it would take a brazen mind to call  
The hand more perfect than the thing it makes.

Wide eyes be sated, you've had surfeit of  
What these collected years in colour meant;  
The clockwork nightingale and hunchbacked dove  
Have not proved brighter or more eloquent.

## LEWIS HOSEGOOD

### *Thespian*

A DМИRABLY, with a pope's poise, he comes:  
mild as a moth-eared lion,  
dropsical seedy with old cake crumbs  
to shake me by the thorny paws.  
In his imperial Cockney, musical as cornets,  
warm as red plush applause,  
he greets both me and the morning  
there in the square of sparrowed  
barrowed Islington  
with a voice that might have been Lear's  
had all gone well.

But I know that tears  
once ripped his life in two  
when Jessie went out like a hansom lamp  
somewhere between the wars  
and, faced with a changing camp,  
he somehow never quite made it.  
Now his soft old bloodshot eyes  
rum where they can in any corner,  
glad of a dollar patronage.

Grease-paint in his pores,  
long lined and weathered to a permanent Nine,  
colours his odd collar, torn, out-worn  
and padded out with a salvaged muffler of  
old silk  
below the long lank greylag goose-hair.  
He defies the contemporary years.

Scrooge and Oliver's beadle declaim from his  
bad breath,  
tireless of telling (pride swelling  
his lubricated voice)  
how he was the Ghost in *Hamlet* thirty-three times  
and understudied Matheson before Lang's death  
robbed him of perfection and the part.

Yet he has a mien that might have been Lear's.  
Every other inch at least a king,  
he stands with his conquering peers  
vanquishing the heart. He endears;  
throws back the winter cloak of his cough  
to salute my foggy coming—  
and over the neat bleak new-built sky-flats  
the sun comes out  
to a flourish of well-tuned sackbutts  
and a roll of remembered cheers.

### ROY FISHER

#### *The Wind at Night*

THE suburb lies like a hand tonight,  
A man's thick hand, so stubborn  
No child or poet can move it.

The wind drives itself mad with messages,  
Clattering train wheels over the roofs,  
Collapsing streets of sound until  
Far towers, daubed with swollen light,  
Lunge closer to abuse it,

This suburb like a sleeping hand,  
With helpless elms that shudder  
Angry between its fingers,  
Powerless to disprove it.

And, love, although the wind derides  
The spaces of this stupid quarter,  
And sets the time of night on edge,  
It mocks the hand, but cannot lose it:

This stillness keeps us in the flesh,  
For us to use it.

## PAUL EDWARDS

### *Laying Out an Old Lady*

I LEAVE her her bony hands with the dark skin laid loosely over her fingers and I leave her tongue which slipped out as she died, indicating me as still firmly here and still living, my face red and damp, my eyes heavy in the sunlight that comes in thick beams through the windows. I must ask forgiveness for sealing her with soft plugs of cotton-wool, for considering her as flesh that was always dead.

The last Sunday of July, now the visiting period is over, the sound of cars coasts along the poplar lined driveways, persistently. Because she was unconscious and could not talk, her relatives had left.

They were called back, too late—she had to die with me. Now, late-afternoon, I cannot close her mouth with ceremonial gentleness (and it must comply with the regulations); if she knew she would relax, I wouldn't be trying to force her jaws shut, holding her head in my hands and pushing, pushing. Soon her body will be information on a pink form in the Secretary's office, a telephone ringing in a Padre's sitting-room.

Soon she will be wholly lost, covered by a blue cloth, lying in the chapel of rest. Through the long creases of her lovely head, sweat runs as she seems to be yielding up her final warmth, her dark hands lay by a too pale waist.

I must unlock her fingers, one by one, make her a lady for her funeral: she must be demure (her mouth soft at the corners), it mustn't appear she has suffered, that for a whole week she has refused food. She must be peaceful.

Now the hospital grounds have emptied I can hear birds  
singing over the slight sound of trolleys and screens  
being wheeled along nearby. Now I must finish this  
duty,  
forget who she was, leave her in easy death.

### NATHANIEL TARN

*On Reading Song VI, from Arthur Waley's "Nine Songs"*

I HAVE grown into my age at last  
and my tongue is in my speech. Those fast  
years of fasting are run. I must grapple  
with the fruit of the celestial tree, the apple.

That first tree in the garden must be climbed  
and a new landscape from its branches limbed,  
a life surveyed from its winterwards foliage  
for I am now the spring, I am now my age.

"There is no sadness greater than a life parting."  
What a proud, what a terrible dying was parting  
then, what a fall of clothes from the spirit,  
a rain of wings on the burial pit!

From the turquoise wings fell a shower of scales,  
from the angel's mouth ran a stream of tales—  
that old spitting moutch of the prosy tout—  
like all the tears of China in a year of drought!

But the angel lies with a spear in his side  
and he won't need his wings on the longest ride  
for I have grown from the heart to my east  
and that far sun breeds fodder there like yeast.

## FRANK BUCHANAN

### *Names*

NAMES were weighty once  
 with connotation—Joshua he  
 Who saves, or Mary May with faint  
 Reverberations of a sea.

As if the name made the person,  
 Was the person, an open sesame  
 To its windy speaking, or acting  
 Through the person's epitome.

Generations have echoed such names :  
 Public names, private—Harry,  
 Helen, Hand, Hardaker, not because  
 Of meaning, but as ally

To trade or jaded lore, as royal relish,  
 Or conviction sacral, sage,  
 Secular: scattered currencies  
 In a haphazard name coinage.

But now names are become frivolous ;  
 Accident of parents, friends, neighbours,  
 Or whim accounts for most of them.  
 And digits, arbitrary integers,

Brutal coefficiencies are grown  
 Connotative instead : not significant  
 Hypostases, but units, particles  
 Minute, wholly unimportant

In rank, yard, or street. Card,  
 Form, index, for hydroid whatever  
 To mark you against any overtone  
 A name might conjure with, or ever

Make meaningful ; unless to names  
 Abstracted among compulsive, overweening  
 Ambiguities of surd cyphers,  
 Anonymity gives meaning.

## MICHAEL THORPE

### *"Sinners All"*

FLEXING my gown, I begin  
My harangue ; another crime  
Not to be winked at, stuck out  
Before their many, beardless doubt  
Putting my fairness on trial  
With ruthless, clear faces  
(Offenders included).

Now first  
The frank appeal, forbearing  
Punishment to all who confess :  
The weaker fall, the others  
Wait and see.

And then  
The moral monologue, so familiar  
That each could give it for me  
(And will, when their turn comes).  
A lull

And we all wait and see :  
I stare, sigh, and finally say  
Passionate things my masters meant,  
And they sit up, as if one day  
The Word will come.

For now,  
There is only collective punishment :  
Each one of us must pay.

## TONY CONNOR

### *Elegy For William Hibbert*

HIBBERT is dead, the old plumber ;  
who will mend our burst pipes now,  
the tap that has dripped all the summer,  
testing the sink's overflow ?

No other like him. Young men with knowledge  
of new techniques, theories from books,  
may better his work straight from college,  
but who will challenge his squint-eyed looks  
in kitchen, bathroom, under floorboards,  
rules of thumb which were often wrong ;  
seek as erringly stopcocks in cupboards,  
or make a job last half as long ?

He was a man who knew the ginnels,  
alleyways, streets,—the whole district ;  
family secrets, minor annals,  
time-honoured fictions fused to fact.

Seventy years of gossip muttered  
under his cap, his tufty thatch,  
so that his talk was slow and clotted,  
hard to follow, and too much.

As though nothing fell, none vanished,  
and Time were the maze of Cheetham Hill,  
in which the dead,—with jobs unfinished—,  
waited to hear him ring the bell.

For much he never got round to doing,  
but meant to, when the weather bucked up,  
or worsened, or when his pipe was drawing,  
or when he'd finished this cup.

I thought time, he forgot so often,  
had forgotten him, but here's Death's pomp  
over his house, and by the coffin  
the son who will inherit his blowlamp,

tools, workshop, cart, and cornet,  
(pride of Cheetham Prize Brass Band),—  
and there's his mourning widow, Janet,  
stood at the gate he'd promised to mend.

Soon he will make his final journey ;  
shaved and silent, strangely trim,  
with never a pause to talk to any-  
body : how arrow-like, for him !

In St. Mark's Church,—whose dismal tower  
he pointed and painted when a lad,—  
they will sing his praises amidst flowers,  
while, somewhere, a cellar starts to flood,

and the housewife banging his front-door knocker  
is not surprised to find him gone,  
and runs for Thwaite, who's a better worker,  
and sticks at a job until it's done.

## RUTH FORBES SHERRY

### *Siren*

AFTER the waste of ocean east and west  
after the roaring reaches north and south  
I broke, a sundrenched wave  
upon the beaches of your mouth.  
I wound you with my ravening hair,  
and lured you to my coral lair.  
Let hurricane howl above.  
I hold my love.

*U.S.A.*

EARLE BIRNEY

*Conference of Heads*

THE quiet diesel in the breast  
propels a trusting keel  
whether we swing toward a port  
or into whales of steel.

The compassed mind must quiver north  
though every chart defective ;  
there is no fog but in the will,  
the iceberg is elective.

*Canada*

J. P. GIBSON

*Lines to Antonio Machado*

D RIVEN to a corner, that the heart will recognise  
its dearest exile, and learn to speak  
of beginnings and endings, without surprise,  
is not so certain. The most loved image escapes,  
and middle-age determines upon wintry landscapes.  
Since the loss is known and memory weak  
to remake the time, the prowling step returns  
to haunt the heights where the watchful elms  
spike the whitened track that burns  
slowly out to Aragon.

The idea of absence overwhelms.  
The harsh terraces scale the ridge to where one  
dust-bitten, black hatted figure dreams  
the stillness within the change, the land's  
blossoming under crime-prone, old Christian hands.

As eternity is whatever comes after, without number  
the scraggy, impassible, damned oxen lumber  
through the gully to the shade ;  
where is the God? Where is the blade?

After the Angelus, immense streams  
of marauding yellow rip  
the austere sky apart, the minutes drip  
out of time and mind. Will there be rain  
upon this land, or other? In the train  
swaying in a crammed third class  
I trace a profile on the sweating glass.

When winter bites and the wild winds wrench  
at the solemn oaks, the heron nests fly,  
Cain's earth's uninnocent inheritors chant French  
irregulars at the moody sky,  
the scuffling clouds, those intricate changers,  
take to the hills. Master, how may we teach  
the ungovernable heart how to die among strangers  
and sleep upon a beach?

\*       \*       \*

(On the outbreak of Civil War in Spain, the poet Antonio Machado remained loyal to the Republican Government and, after the fall of Barcelona in January 1939, went into exile with the remnant of the Republican Army. In February the same year Machado died in the small French village of Collioure and was buried there.

In contrast to the glittering Andalusian manner of Jimenez and Lorca, Machado is the poet of the harsh, barren uplands of Castille. *Campos de Castilla* (Fields of Castille), a volume which appeared in 1911, is an incomparable evocation of an austere, dry landscape. Belonging to the so-called generation of '98, whose most famous names are those of Unamuno and Ortega, the lonely and withdrawn Machado is now generally recognised as the greatest contemporary poet in the Spanish language—J. P. Gibson.)

## GEOFFREY HOLLOWAY

### *The Hipsters*

THE night's theirs, to spotlight Mulligan  
or Brubeck.

In the strewn cellar of their aspiration,  
with reefered know-how on their potent lips,  
they listen, making smoke-rings round the thought  
of the square world that works so weirdly  
for cowardice,

the creeps cluttering its breadlines, deadlines,  
like stale tickets, drilled to dragging mediocrity . . .

The night's now, and they are with it, man,—  
in the kick and glitter of its negroid horn ;  
from the mushroom-cloudy past into the pulse  
of a swinging present systematically deranged ;  
zipped-up with lingo, shooting as it comes  
with mood-music, an incessant crazy pickup,  
a sawn-off hipflask of barbaric-straight salvation.

Nothing is so solid as the moment, its  
religious traps of sudden lifemanship and lust :  
the crown of tab ends lipstick-flushed  
with imminent orgasmic victory ;  
the Zen-bright catalyst to inhale and slowly  
squander . . .

all the time in the apocalyptic world  
to play it cool with cancer, take a fix from death.

## DONALD THOMAS

### *Detective Story*

**T**IRES beyond counting, day would crystallize  
The crimes of twilight wished upon this lawn,  
Fronting the glass-domed orangery. Now, like  
Strange mosque-mosaic, opal tints of dawn  
Depose all doubt: pale morning colours strike  
The calf-lined library where the outrage lies.

Who drove the blade's thud to the spine  
Or drilled flame's rivet to the brain?  
The lidless eyes make murder plain,  
Arsenical the tight lips grin.

Early that day there came the patient man  
To make his survey of the tidy corpse:  
Listed each motive, opportunity  
And nerve to hate. But hate would start a plan  
To kill in sequence to infinity.  
Each suspect jockeyed for a friend's collapse.

Who was the lurking figure seen  
Among the lakeside trees, before  
A key was found to fit that door  
Through which no living man had been?

Hate left them sick: they chose security  
And searched out footprints on the morning path:  
Only one cast would mould the killer's build,  
Only one face would match identity.  
Quick consultations framed official truth  
To clinch the case: the corpse it was that killed.

## MICHAEL MOTT

### *Marriage*

**O**N that first morning he got up and went  
Straight from the bed into wet meadows  
Where horses grazed under the mountain  
And pine trees cast their longest shadows.

He stood beside the wooden bridge and waited  
And heard the creek move over rocks and poles,  
He watched a blue-jay in a yellow aspen  
And saw two mares come drinking with their foals.

To set a distance from that cabin door,  
To watch the sun dry out the mist and dew,  
To hear her call, and know his senses,  
Snatched from his body, had been made anew.

## ALASDAIR ASTON

### *“Essential Drama”*

**I**F I choose at this point to have three boys dancing  
Enter stage left, like leopards prancing,  
And a girl in tights throw a central fit  
While the drums run wild in a house ill-lit  
Would they stand on their seats shouting, “This is it!  
The greatest drama of the age!”

Better labour the stage with fifteen dead  
Dying in terror, foot on head,  
As the blood runs down with sluggish care;  
Then slip from the theatre as soon as I dare  
My exiled feet on the pavements bare—  
The greatest drama of the age.

But queens with terrible heads of hair  
Pass in the street, O turn and stare!  
Five tragic acts are not so great  
As a man in the crowd arrives too late  
For the waving hand, the closing gate —  
The greatest drama of the age.

### JAMES SCHEVILL

#### *The Blessed Defeat of Reason*

IN slums, reason is desired  
To mold the nightmare into sense.  
Logic glows and cannot die  
As long as mind exists to fence.

Only love commands the mind.  
Softly the naked flesh in heat  
Seeks the answer of mystery,  
When graceful reason wins defeat.

Through the night where lovers lie  
Kissing in the darkened sun,  
The wonder of the world,  
Although it cannot win, is won.

*U.S.A.*

## BOB HAVERLY

### *Sadistic Sonnet*

LOOK into the mirror, man, and see your face  
pursue you fixedly, in love of all,  
self, anything ; note that secretions fall  
from your eyes compassionately onto a place  
of no concern, or person, the subtle grace  
lodged in your lips, sympathy that seems to maul  
your forehead, ears waiting for a call  
from anyone, love cramming every space.

Look again tomorrow and read hatred there  
written in block capitals and underlined  
in blood and sweat ; and take note of your eyes where  
they are blackest, unconditional, and blind :  
remark above all from the changing of the flame,  
the images are different, the object is the same.

## M. O. DENCH

### *Dowager*

WHAT is it that resides behind her face,  
Masking emotion, camouflaging eyes,  
Holding in check the impact of her grace ?

Her melancholy comes as a surprise  
To one unknowing of the secret heart  
Hidden beneath that passionless disguise.

In her declining years she lives apart,  
Surrounded by the relics of an age  
When all that wealth could substitute for art  
Acquired for her a sterile heritage.

## A DIALECT PURIFIED

*Poems:* Lotte Zurndorfer (Chatto & Windus, 10s. 6d.).

*Imaginings:* David Holbrook (Putnam, 12s. 6d.).

*Once Bitten, Twice Bitten:* Peter Porter (Scorpion Press, 15s.).

THE poetry of Miss Zurndorfer is pleasant, well-written, unobtrusive, and easily forgettable. Her best work is, however, preferable to that of many better-known writers. For instance—

“Snow falls : in France I see the long garden,  
The tall trees, poplar or plane tree, the houses  
High and narrow; and so across the Norman  
Landscape is drawn this familiar  
Mnemonic for home : snowflakes fining in distance.”

This works, all right. Notice the way in which the details are selected to suggest an uncomfortable elongated sort of country. Notice, too, the delicate play on the word “drawn.” This develops the idea of the snow at once softening the landscape and making it familiar, and so prepares us for the clinching conceit “mnemonic.”

But nothing much is said in these poems. They are on decorous “poetic” subjects, as can be seen from the titles of even the better ones : *Pony, Cathedral, Autumn and a New Country*. Miss Zurndorfer’s limitations can be best suggested by quoting her against herself. “The Good-Hearted Servant” grips our attention as the rest of her verse does not. The dead are seen ironically

“Devoured by black brooding, without  
A bed-companion, and no-one for a chat,  
Old skeletons worked over by worms, frozen into splinters.”

But this is, of course, a translation from Baudelaire. However, its quality may indicate the direction in which Miss Zurndorfer’s undoubted talent should be guided. Like Ruth Speirs and Arthur Waley, she might accomplish truly original work within the bounds of translation.

The urgency missing in Miss Zurndorfer is found—breathless, blundering, compelling—in David Holbrook. But no-one could say that Mr. Holbrook writes well.

“Whiteside was dead who told  
Of the German corpses he had found, the same  
Blood-centred blackened shrunken effigy of bold  
Lost warring man. Shall I not burn away for him,  
His children whom I saw in photographs, when mine  
Widen their bright eyes at the tales I tell from Grimm,  
Withholding grimmer tales? My double joys refine  
Because those troopers knew no more glad beds or wives,

And even our worst majors cried to read their last  
Poor stumbling letters home, out of their packs? Lives  
Whose loss left me alive."

This could be faulted so easily: the willed rhymes, the bad pun, the catalogues of adjectives and the helpless verbs, the functionless variations of rhythm, the general cacophony. Yet few people will read even this extract and remain unmoved; still less the whole poem. For Mr. Holbrook is that rare being, a really honest writer. He doesn't set down just those things that make him look good or feel good. No, there he is, take him or leave him, warts and all—and, just in case you've missed a few, he'll gladly point them out for you. This is his value, and his liability. The value of this poem is its authenticity—he's glad to have come through because, with all the good will in the world, his life and children mean more to him than Sergeant Whiteside's. At the same time, this realisation, and the realisation that, but for Whiteside, he wouldn't have come through at all, make him uneasy even in his domestic comfort.

The liability of this poetry is that the experience is seldom dramatized—we are asked to sympathize with these events not because they matter but because they happened to David Holbrook. Thus, the War is reduced to merely personal terms. Much gets through that is meandering or pedestrian; much that is fascinating—especially the love poems, *To His Wife Going to Bed* and *Beginnings*.

It's worth plodding through the painstaking imitations of the writers Mr. Holbrook feels he ought to be influenced by—Hardy, Hopkins, Edward Thomas—we get *their* warts, too—because of the interest in having a personality so nakedly unfolded to us. But that's as far as it goes. If anyone thinks that is as far as any poet can go, they should look at the work of Mr. Peter Porter.

Mr. Porter's experience has always a representative quality. That is, it has a relevance to the human situation beyond the fact that it happened to happen. The Australian childhood so vividly evoked in *A Christmas Recalled* is far more than that. An atmosphere of complacency is suggested in the images of life just going through pre-ordained motions. It's mostly done in the verbs—the ferry-boats "wallowed", the 'regatta-crowded' quays were "resting heavily"—

"From the dock cranes smoke  
Stood straight up, the gulls and cicadas sat  
Noisily on our huge summer; even the air was fat."

This does not occur in the poem because it is "good imagery", nor even because it happened to be that way. For the adults are complacent, too; witness their pursuits and talk.

"In that time I heard my uncle calling my mother :  
'Marion, I've made a new one, give it a try.'"

But the child senses flaws in the apparently prevailing calm.

"I saw my face stretched in his cocktail shaker  
When I wiped the condensation off. . . ."

A child's sensitivity to atmosphere demands to be allayed by the certainties of grown-ups—their

"Noise a secure lullaby drinking up my fear."

But Christmas is the time when children behave childishly, and so, with less reason, do adults—the respective modes of behaviour are correlated in the ambiguity of the first phrase—

"But after eating too much one bloated day  
When I broke three toys wantonly and clumsily  
My uncle started to talk of the war, not the way  
Men talk of the Last War but as prophets do  
of retribution—'we've got about two or three  
Years before the Japs come'."

The mischievous game of frightening oneself is likely to be more than a game to children—"I ran to the garden to cry"—though it may be only that to adults.

"I thought too of death which was word like 'when'  
And not a thing like 'cat' . . . ."

But it's only a word to the adults, after all; a concept spoken of, not grasped emotionally.

"I looked to see  
If they had painted what their talk foresaw  
On their Christmas faces, the picture of a war."

This is, then, a poem about the eye of childhood and the deadening sophistication of middle age; about a deliberate complacency disturbed, in spite of itself, by foreboding; about the approach of war, the fear of war, and war itself. It is in this way far more than a personal experience. Porter's poetry seldom does one thing at a time, and its complexity of effect is liable to make us question the validity of any single account of it. Thus, in *Mr. Roberts*, Porter indicts the public-school system—

"He was the great Consul and his teacher's gown  
Out-toga'd the forum of his Latin class"

— and the deadening effect it has on those who carry it out —

"His eyes translated what they rested on"

—and the compulsive rule over children—

"Boys of the pudding world, unstoical faces,  
Ears beyond the ablative."

— and the insensitive and insensitizing effect of this rule —

"A Rugby field was the Republic's mould  
Which that soft thing the self so rightly feared"

— and the later repercussions, of which these are only isolated examples —

"Later a man shot himself, a man went mad—ask  
The secret smoker in the bike shed what  
Sour light stood on the school's weather vane . . ."

The whole is couched in terms which suggest a critique of an entire culture. The poem does not progress from one statement to another so much as add to each statement another statement in which the earlier one is implied, the earlier ones themselves foreshadowing those that are to come. The effect is that of notes building up into a chord. The various statements are held simultaneously but in a definite group of relationships in the mind, rather than in the simple A plus B plus C of conceptual prose, the method of exegesis and comment. The critic may well despair of conveying any idea of the attitudes fused into a dramatic complex in poems such as *A Christmas Recalled* and *Mr. Roberts*.

And, too, in poems there is no space to discuss—*John Marston Advises Anger*, *Metamorphosis*, *The Historians Call Up Pain*, *Annotations of Auschwitz*, *Walking Home on St. Cecilia's Day*. But there is nothing in this volume—the collected work of thirteen years — that is expendable. This is a better poetry than the age demands or critics are trained to expect.

PHILIP HOBSBAUM.

*Spun Sequence*: John Varney (Villiers, 15s.)

*Poems for a Prose Age*: John Varney (Unicorn Press, 15s.)

*A Little Geste and Other Poems*: Daniel G. Hoffman (O.U.P. 15s.)

*Fabled City: West African Poems*: Raymond Tong (MacLellan, 7s. 6d.)

IN these days when the price of books is rapidly rising above all contact with what is left out of salaries, there is some comfort in the fact that Mr. Varney and his publishers offer quantity for money. *Poems for a Prose Age* contains over a hundred pages of verse, while *Spun Sequence* extends almost to two hundred.

Mr. Varney considers that a "poet is bucket down a jagged well"; he repeatedly brings up his ideas in pailsful and splashes them out in front of us. "I cut some capers" he says,

"Write odd spun, clang-hoofed phrases  
facing the music of what IS.  
bending to her jangled breasts."

He has been writing and publishing for forty years and more, and knows what he wants to say, which is mainly a gloss on United States literature through the past century. Expression is lively and varied; a personality at once active and disinterested appears on the surface as the bubbles die down; there is a little envy and a touch of ill-temper now and then: on the whole his very facility and dashing abundance prevent the achievement of anything vitally memorable.

Mr. Hoffman is rather more eclectic in style. His reading is perhaps wider than Mr. Varney's, which leads him to experiment in a pastiche-like manner on the subject of Robin Hood and His Merrie Men — the backward look turning almost to quaintness at times, although his skill and ingenuity of rhyme and rhythm cannot be denied. There is nothing careless about his thought or technique. He is precise and deep, intensely aware and almost passionately attached to his characters—Taliesin and Friar Tuck, Rin-Tin-Tin and Maid Marian, the woman with the cow head, and Will Scarlet. In short, Mr. Hoffman knows what poetry is and what poetry has been,

"What image or imagining  
This stone reflects  
of men, who brings into his art  
Magnificence, or resplendency  
the art brings to his acts."

Mr. Tong's West African poems have been published separately all over the world. It might reasonably be expected that a man who

has lived during the last twelve years or so in Nigeria and Uganda should be ready to convey to the outsider some indication of the agonies and struggles of which Westerners have now become disturbingly aware. Yet he prefers to describe just what he sees or has read—the tropical forest, the

“savage idol smile  
in some mud village of my yesterday”,

a negro girl laughing, a negro boy weeping, that Fabled City mentioned by Portuguese explorers in 1485—and, in spite of some feeble verse here and there, he does hint without precision at a personal disquiet underneath his blandness. Much of the matter could be set down by any versifier who has read enough travel-books, but whenever Mr. Tong manages to bring stronger technique to bear on his observation —

“ . . . where the tragedy  
of flesh is but the sensual moment, where  
regret and tenderness have never been”

—the colour-film comes to life, the verse to fruition.

HUGH CREIGHTON HILL

Swinburne : *Poems*. Selected and introduced by Bonamy Dobrée (Penguin Poets, 3s. 6d.).

THOUGH Swinburne died more than 50 years ago, his poetry has been out of fashion for many years. Is it possible that we are witnessing the beginning of a revival of interest in the poet and his work? Close on the heels of Edith Sitwell's selection from his poems and Cecil Lang's collections of *The Swinburne Letters* comes the Penguin selection edited by Bonamy Dobrée.

In his excellent introduction, Professor Dobrée keeps his feet on firmer critical ground than Dame Edith did on the same subject, though occasionally in defending the poet he leaves himself open to misconstruction, not so much by what he says as by what he leaves unsaid. For instance, referring to the charge that Swinburne's poetry is “all sound and no sense”, he remarks that sound is itself sense—“otherwise, what is the virtue of music?” A little elaboration here would have made his point clearer, for, as Professor Dobrée rightly observes, “with a poet sound is itself part of the vehicle that conveys his whole being . . . it is through sound that he breaks down the resistances against the freezing of the imagination from the prison of merely logical apprehension . . . ”

The selection should satisfy the most exacting critics. Professor Dobrée has attempted to provide examples of every aspect of Swinburne's poetry, "the passionate, the contemplative, the complex, and the simple, contrasting as they came those packed with ideas and the more easily assimilated narrative piece, the vivid and the incantatory," but it has been necessary to exclude the very long poems. By including *A Forsaken Garden*—

"Till the slow sea rise and the sheer cliff crumble,  
Till terrace and meadow the deep gulfs drink,  
Till the strength of the waves of the high tides humble  
The fields that lessen, the rocks that shrink,  
Here now in his triumph where all things falter,  
Stretched out on the spoils that his own hand spread,  
As a god self-slain on his own strange altar,  
Death lies dead."

— *Hertha*, *Hymn of Man*, and *The Garden of Proserpine*, amongst other poems, Professor Dobrée has also corrected some of the more obvious omissions in Dame Edith's selection.

#### COLIN PEARCE

*The Skull in the Mud*: D. J. Livingstone.

*On Approval*: Kevin Crossley-Holland.

*Young Kingdom, Come*: Gillian Mills.

*A Journey*: Erica Johnson.

*Astrology and other poems*: Ellen E. H. Collins

*In Braver Sunlight*: Michael Johnson

*Shadows in the Orchard*: Shirley Toulson. Scorpion Press, 8s.6d.

All published by  
OUTPOSTS  
PUBLICATIONS,  
3s. each

THE booklet at the head of my list is the first collection by a young Rhodesian poet whose work, apart from a poem published in this magazine, is quite unknown to me, and it has an extraordinary vitality which, surprisingly enough for any Rhodesian or South African poet, owes nothing to Roy Campbell. Mr. Livingstone, who refers to himself as "a mucoid Jonah", stands "sentry in the shade", recording what he sees with scrupulous attention to detail; yet he is not simply a detached observer. There is both movement and compassion in his work. His best poems are those which reflect local colour and conditions—*Chez Moi in Central Africa*, *Departure*, *Drought* and *Africa* — but it is the title poem which most fittingly expresses his individuality.

Mr. Crossley-Holland, more limited in outlook, seems to be exploring personal relationships and feelings in an attempt to establish some kind of pattern of human experience. He is always on the verge of impressive statement, but avoids the grand gesture. For him it is the present moment of existence which has meaning, not the past or the prophetic future.

In *The Embrace* and *To a Young Bride*, Miss Gillian Mills deals with even more intimate aspects of the man-woman relationship, from a woman's point of view, but since she isolates the particular experience with which she is concerned and rounds off the subject, so to speak, her poems appear to be more finished. Certainly she makes her points with economy and intensity. *Dust-Storm* and *Summer Garden* are descriptive pieces which admirably recapture the atmosphere, but in the title-poem she tends to display her emotions a little too openly.

*A Journey*, the second booklet by Miss Erica Johnson, might be described as a philosophical sequence since it provides a poetic account of the author's search for understanding. Miss Johnson is to be congratulated on the way in which she develops her main arguments by means of concrete images rather than dry abstractions. The whole consists of 17 pieces, some no more than the necessary connecting passages and others complete poems in their own right, held together by a consistent attitude to life in general.

*Astrology*, on the other hand, is a collection of lyrics on a number of subjects in a variety of moods, though fundamentally religious in concept. There are, for instance, poems of simple description which achieve what was intended, poems reflecting the author's reactions to people around her, poems of enquiry and affirmation, and poems featuring mythological characters, all executed with careful craftsmanship; but it seems to me that Miss Collins is at her best with the miniature (such as her *Figurine*).

Humorous and ironical by turn, yet entirely serious in purpose and effect, the poems of *In Braver Sunlight* are deceptive in their apparently lighthearted attack upon the problems of our age. Some of them have a neat epigrammatic quality, and most of them have their pay-off lines :

"But in any sort of pool  
It seems to be the rule  
I'd have finished up the sort of fish I am."

*(The Compleat Fish).*

Although *Annunciations of the Sun* and *Bristol Channel* are, perhaps, the most ambitious poems in the booklet, my own preference is for the shorter *Science Museum* and *Here and Now*. At a time when poets seem desperately anxious to keep in line and con-

form to the prevailing ideas and techniques, Mr. Michael Johnson is an individualist who can afford to make fun of himself without becoming self-conscious about it.

Miss Shirley Toulson has an admirable technique at her command, and her work displays unusual insight, but one is impressed more by her obvious potentiality than by her actual achievements. A few of her poems are so slight or fragmentary — though well-written — that they appear to be little more than casual reflections left oddly in the air. Yet two of her poems, *Christmas Church* and *Step-Father*, are superior to anything in the booklets under review :

“And were you at his death (his mother was)?  
It wasn’t you he cried to at the last,  
It wasn’t you who laid him in his grave.  
But there’s one comfort, when these things were past,  
The Church somehow has always found you good.  
Did you make crosses, Joseph, from your wood?”

JOHN SEYMOUR

## NOTICES

**OUTPOSTS PUBLICATIONS.** The latest additions to the *Outposts* Series of booklets are : *In Braver Sunlight* by Michael H. F. Johnson, *The Tallest Tower* by Maurice Buesnel, *Astrology and Other Poems* by Ellen E. H. Collins, *Swords of the Kingdom* by Alan Robinson, *A Stone my Star* by Betty Parvin, *A Pattern in Time* by Alan Crang, *And the dark brought frost* by Christabel Fowler, and *In the Web* by Roy Boardman.

**THE DULWICH GROUP.** The monthly readings of poetry held by The Dulwich Group at the Crown and Greyhound, Dulwich Village, S.E.21, will commence again on the last Wednesday in September. The Crown and Greyhound is easily reached from North Dulwich Station (London Bridge) and Herne Hill (Victoria). It is close to the No. 37 bus route.

**THE HEADLANDS**, poems by Howard Sergeant (published by Putnams) can be ordered through local booksellers or obtained from this address, price 8s. including postage. "Those who despair of the aims and values of modern poetry should ponder Mr. Sergeant and think again." *Contemporary Review*.

**P.E.N. MEMBERSHIP.** Readers will be interested to hear that Dr. Michael H. F. Johnson has been elected to membership of the P.E.N. on the strength of his collection of poems, *In Braver Sunlight*, published in the *Outposts* Series.